

A Heroine and the Trials

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What do you first think about when you hear the word “heroine”? Do you think the words “audacious”, “diligent”, or “strong”? Hoosier women played tremendous roles in remarkable events like the Great Depression, WWI, and WWII. One extraordinary African-American Hoosier heroine, Kathleen Flossie Bailey, transformed Indiana history forever by paving the way towards the Civil Rights Movement as a genuine gladiator for justice and equality.

Bailey was born in Kokomo, Indiana in 1895. She was an intelligent, and kind hearted Christian who was a leader among her friends. During World War I, she married Dr. Walter T. Bailey and they had a son. In 1918, Mrs. Bailey professionally developed and led the the national organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because she wanted more for her son and all Hoosier African-Americans.

Bailey inherently believed in the equality of all people regardless of race and gender. These beliefs were tested on August 7, 1930. On that evening, three African-American teenagers, Tom Shipp, Abe Smith, and James Cameron were accused of robbing a white man and raping a white woman. Upon hearing the accusations a mob formed at the jail. The mob broke the bricks around the iron entrance door with sledgehammers to get to the boys. When Bailey heard about the mob, she attempted to move the young men for protection. They then pulled the three young men from their cells, beat them, and dragged them to the tree on the courthouse square. Shipp and Smith were lynched, Bailey was too late. Luckily, James Cameron, the youngest of the trio,

was narrowly spared from the same fate. Shockingly, the mob and police allowed Shipp and Smith to hang throughout the night (and even be photographed) to intimidate and send a message to African-Americans who “stepped out of line”. The boys never received a fair trial which denies them their sixth amendment rights.

The terrifying night of injustice empowered our heroine to finally stand up against the malice that had Marion, and all of Indiana, by the throat. When Bailey and NAACP leaders tried to convince Governor Leslie to revoke the sheriff that allowed Shipp and Smith to be lynched of his job, and bring prosecution of mob leaders, Leslie gave no support. Bailey was determined justice to be served. She contacted the head of NAACP, Walter White. White conducted his own investigation. Indiana Attorney General, James Ogden, he started his own investigation to craved to support Bailey.

On August 13, investigators interviewed police officers and citizens who witnessed the lynching to find out who led the mob. Everyone gave the same story about how they didn't recognize anybody they knew in the mob. Undoubtedly they feared they were going to be punished for revealing information, or they unanimously decided no one would be tried for murder if information was not revealed.

In August 1930, the trial against two suspected mob leaders occurred. At the trial, Bailey fearlessly brought in twenty African-Americans into the courtroom which was filled with a significant amount of white Americans. They all sat in the courtroom with brave silence to send a message that they demanded equality. Unfortunately, the suspected mob leaders were found

innocent, but Bailey could be proud at her noble attempt because by March 1931, Bailey's efforts led to the signing by Governor Leslie of the anti-lynching law.

Bailey stayed true to her beliefs of fairness for all Hoosiers. She is the epitome of a heroine. She represented Hoosier women as determined fighters. Even though Bailey and her family were harassed because of her efforts, she kept her head up. One time, she fought along with her husband to demand justice when the Robert W. Long Hospital didn't admit African-American patients or African-American students to train on its floors. Bailey is the pure face of a warrior for equality. This impactful Hoosier heroine will be remembered for her fortitude and courage.



Marion Lynching, August 7 1930